

April 28, 2004

Dear Ron Martin:

I am writing in response to your ad for a news columnist posted on [journalismjobs.com](http://journalismjobs.com).

I could spend a lot of time writing a typical cover letter and make it real formal the way you're supposed to and tell you how I've been a writer my entire life, and how I was on the editorial staff of the *Welcomat* (now *Philadelphia Weekly* AKA *PW*) and how I was production manager and know how to put a newspaper together and how I wrote a regular column for 11 years, for half of that time writing two other columns for additional publications.

But instead of doing that, let's just say I saw that ad and a bunch of ideas came into my mind. And let's just say you gave me shot, accepting some qualifications and ignoring others because I'm a talented writer.

So what would I write about if I had that column?

Well, I could write about what is probably one of the more expensive fan belts in history. How I was driving home to Philly on the New Jersey Turnpike last summer after attending a concert in New York and how the warning light came on the dash and temperature gauge rose way too quickly and how I made it to the Richard Stockton rest stop only to find no mechanic on duty, and that everyone who worked in that rest stop could barely speak English and how none of them *knew* which rest stop it was (which I didn't take time notice because I was too concerned with getting my vehicle off safely the highway before it blew up). And I could tell you about having to call the NJ Turnpike Authority after finding out the towing service my car insurance company provides didn't have access to the Turnpike, and how the person I spoke to at the authority told me I couldn't leave my car at the rest stop till morning even though it was parked in a legitimate space. And I could write about how it is totally preposterous, especially at a time when people are in great need of work that the service areas of the New Jersey Turnpike which (without looking it up) has to be one of the most-traveled highways in the country do not have an all-night mechanic on duty. And I could write about how at four in the morning I finally ended up at some Day's Inn in Burlington, because there aren't any all-night service stations, and how I had to deal with a totally nasty receptionist the next morning at the towing company and how I finally arrived home 15 hours after leaving New York a few hundred dollars poorer, and

that's not even going into the three or four months it took me to get reimbursed for towing and storage by my insurance company. (And yes, I could take it further and investigate just who gets those towing contracts and why.)

Or I could write about my total outrage at the cost of my natural gas bill (more than my monthly rent) and how no politician is doing anything about it, yet Congress stops everything to ponder the Janet Jackson incident.

Or I could write about my outrage every time I go into a super market. Let's face it, the price of a box of cornflakes is ridiculous, and that's not to mention the fact that lettuce used to be sold by the head and bananas by the bunch, or that instead of increasing the price of a can of coffee or dishwashing detergent, companies simply decrease the weight while keeping the container the same size.

Or maybe I could write about going into a deli, ordering a chopped liver sandwich and being charged an additional forty cents for a slice of onion.

Or I could write about turning on my television and having it immediately go to the Comcast station, in this case *It's Your Call* with Lynn Doyle and how this particular show is about HIV and AIDS, and how the no-nothing doctor guest expert is giving out totally wrong information about drugs and how to pay for them when there are several organizations in Philadelphia alone that would have the correct information, and that there are federally-funded, state-administered programs to help people who can't afford those drugs pay for them which is never mentioned to the people calling in with questions. Or I could take that another step and write about how that program in the State of New Jersey requires each participant to re-register every six months, as if a cure is suddenly imminent.

Or I could write about how the corporatization of America is quickly eroding everything great about this country on every level. From how nothing has a name anymore (how many names has the Continental Airlines Arena had already; was it really necessary for the Garden State Arts Center really have to be changed to the PNC Bank Arts Center; and if this trend continues, in ten years will it be Comcast-Philadelphia, Time-Warner-AOL-CNN-New York, Trump-Atlantic City, or Disney-Florida?) to vanishing neighborhood stores that can't possibly compete with the chains, and how if you want to buy a box of paper clips, you have to buy five boxes because that's how Staples or Office Max sells them.

And then there's the price of prescription drugs, not only for seniors, but for everybody. I don't see any politician doing anything about that. And speaking of healthcare, how about some cost-cutting clerk in a cubicle deciding how long someone should be hospitalized hospital based on some statistic instead of a doctor?

Or maybe I could write about how I spent Christmas week two years ago trying to help an alcoholic friend who'd hit bottom and ended up homeless on Christmas night. How I drove to Asbury Park at midnight to rescue him, and spent the next week trying to get him help while keeping him sober. How his Bible-thumping mother in North Carolina would have nothing to do with him and his other relatives wouldn't either. How this guy was actually a brilliant programmer and computer whiz. How various social service agencies and crisis management centers in Philadelphia led nowhere, how he couldn't return home to North Carolina because he had a New Jersey driver's license and no longer considered a resident so no facility there would admit him, and how in the end my only choice was to take him back to Asbury Park, drop him at the emergency room of a hospital with a treatment center and hope for the best.

Or I could write about how computers are by far the greatest planned-obsolescence scam every perpetuated on the public, requiring anyone who's going to use one for slightly more than word processing to get a new one every few years. And speaking of computers, I could write about how when you call tech support you now get Bombay or some other exotic location and how if you can get past giving them your name, or your user name if it's Internet tech support, you've scored a major achievement, but then may have to spend another half hour explaining the source of the problem, because these advisors are trained to only go by the book they're obviously reading on the phone, so you can't possibly skip from step one to say step four and then have to end up ignoring almost everything they say because something went down and no one in the chain of command bothered to notify them.

Or I could write about a bar I know about in Princeton that presents musical entertainment, but will only compensate the musicians with free beer. Now let's not take into account, practice time, the cost of musical equipment, everything that goes into performing, let alone the obvious fact that after a night of free beer, these musicians are going to drive home.

But I guess none of these stories would appeal to the average Burlington County resident. And I guess because I never made it to a daily paper on a daily basis as a real reporter, even though I am well

aware of checking sources (something a lot of reporters and editors seem to have forgotten about lately) I have nothing to say, know nothing about issues and this email will end up in a cyber void somewhere, along with the far more proper ones I've sent to prospective employers over the years.

My resume is attached. For examples of my writing and to know much more about me, feel free to check out my website:  
<http://www.peterstonebrown.com>.

For people familiar with my work, you may contact:

Jack Lule, Chair: Journalism Department, Lehigh, University:  
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Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Peter S. Brown